



# Contemporary quantitative and qualitative public relations research methods in Arab scholarly studies: A meta-research

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## ABSTRACT

Communication scholars in the Arab countries have started to address new fields of scholarly literature in the public relations discipline over the last decade. The crucial change induced by the Arab Spring in many Arab countries has propelled public relations scholars to investigate the type of changes that affect scholarly research methods in the genre of communication at large, and public relations in particular. In the current study, the meta-analysis method was utilised to examine a total of 61 scholarly work (2012 to 2022), from seven Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Jordan and Sudan). The sample included 23 master's theses and 38 PhD dissertations. The criteria for evaluation mainly addressed methods, interdisciplinary approaches, topics and contextual variables. The results reveal that first, the majority of the sample studies depended on quantitative methods. Second, interdisciplinary approaches were evident and included fields of marketing, political communication and social media research. Third, the topics studied in the seven Arab countries varied, as explained in detail in the paper. Fourth, the contextual variables included socio-political and cultural variables. Lastly, future research is needed to investigate the new impacts of social media on research methods in the field of public relations.

Keywords: **Public relations methods, the Arab world, governance, meta-research, social movements**

## INTRODUCTION

Communication has become a fundamental aspect of the current landscape of digital technologies. Communication is a time-space relationship that can be and has been mediated by language. Grunig (2023) brought his knowledge of publics, models of public relations, organisational structures and cultures, internal communication, and evaluation research to the field of public relations (PR) research. This led communication scholars to expand into new horizons of public relations research.

This second decade of the 21st century presents mounting new challenges. The capacity of infrastructure favours the creation of large institutions that offer the dimensions of instantaneity, connectivity, transparency and sharing. This is evident in the many institutions of the Arab world. In return, these bodies extract our data. To this end, scholars in organisational communication have realised the importance of studying the new effects and impacts on scholarly research literature in the field of public relations.

Certain questions were considered in this study. What type of communication is this? What are the developments taking place in the field of organisational communication? What can be expected for the future of communication research in the field of public relations?

This study aims to bring together PR research and studies carried out in seven Arab countries (Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, Jordan and Sudan) and reveal the discrepancies between qualitative and quantitative research methods used in them.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Larsen (2020) argued that networks have captured the imagination of the public as well as researchers. We frequently use them to understand social issues in the digital age. We engage in network analysis and we conceptualise social life as fundamentally networked (p. 1260). The essence of surveying the literature here, is to shed light on the different changes in scholarly research that address and affect the field of public relations.

Frandsen and Johansen (2013) studied the possible dual relationship between public relations and the new mode of institutionalism. How can neo-institutional organisational theory contribute to public relations research? How is public relations (corporate communication or strategic communication) institutionalised in private and public organisations? The authors focused on the shift towards a more complex and interactive understanding of how and why organisations adopt institutionalised norms. They developed a set of research questions to be addressed by future cross-disciplinary research in public relations and neo-institutional organisational theory.

In another work, Eggenberger and Redcross (2018) maintained that the public relations industry is undergoing a revolution in the use of data to define promotional programs, to measure influence and to address the needs of clients with greater precision. It utilises tools that range from online surveys to social media listening and applying big data with sophisticated algorithms.

Arwidson (2020) discussed Swedish cultural institutions' digital public relations work and investigated what digital coordinators at institutions consider as essential skills in their work and how they define and implement effective and successful communication online. The author analysed data from interviews conducted with communications professionals at Swedish cultural institutions. The study looked at the main difficulties, similarities and dissimilarities in digital public relations today. The results showed that the

main challenges revolve around conciseness and correctness, which could be attributed to fewer constraints in the digital setting, inattention, the faster pace of working online and a higher tolerance for errors.

Additionally, Vardeman-Winter and Place (2015) explored how the practitioner culture is maintained despite legal, technical, and educational issues resulting from the deluge of social media content. The authors examined the nexus of the practitioner culture, social media usage, and regulatory forces such as policies, authority figures, and social norms. To explore the practitioner culture, a cultural studies approach was used. Specifically, the circuit of the culture model framed the data analysis.

Pompper (2015) noted that public relations is regarded as an asset for organisation-stakeholder relationship building as well as ethical corporate social responsibility and sustainability communication. This field also faces challenges linked to the negative perceptions of the profession. He examined public relations, postmodern, and critical theories that can empower public relations professionals in transforming organisations into ethical, authentic, and transparent actors in the public sphere.

Apart from that, Jun and Firdaus (2022) discussed the newly emerging digital-individual media system dependency (MSD) to theorise political information dependency within a social media environment. They found that the emergence of the Internet and new media affordances have not merely expanded the existing media systems, but also introduced new sources of dependency for information. The model is meaningful as it offers new insights into emerging and future understanding of political information (p. 1).

In another study, Duhé (2015) conducted a 34-year review of communication technology research published in six public relations journals. The survey revealed that studies of applications and perceptions far outnumber investigations focused on usability, concerns, or theoretical contributions related to scholars' and practitioners' understanding of new media.

Verčič et al. (2015) reviewed the growth of scholarship on the nexus between public relations, ICT and digital, social and mobile (DSM) media. They also sought to assess whether these media cause people to think differently regarding the rules of engagement with these publics. They focused on media as “tools” for the purposes of media relations.

DiStaso et al. (2011) studied social media in organisations. Corporate executives are consistently challenged by the ever-changing and oftentimes, uncontrollable affordances of social media. This study provided insights obtained from 25 interviews with communication and public relations executives on the forces that drive social media in organisations, challenges faced, and arising questions regarding social media and its measurement.

Huang et al. (2017) analysed 141 articles that were published between 2008 and 2014 to determine whether PR research has undergone a paradigm shift resulting from the rise of social media. Compared with digital PR research before 2008, the authors found that: a) social media has become a major research topic while remaining a secondary concern of PR practitioners; b) digital PR studies are gradually shifting from description to theorisation; c) studies showed a general trend of methodological diversification; and d) the development of digital PR research frameworks.

Adding on, Theunissen and Noordin (2012) offered a critical approach in exploring the philosophical underpinnings and key features of dialogue in public relations practice and thinking. They argued that the dialogue has been uncritically equated with two-way symmetrical communication. Their study drew from a range of literature, including mainstream public relations and communication philosophy, particularly the philosophy of Martin Buber. The study aimed to explore the concept of dialogue and its philosophical underpinning.

Further, Lee (2017) conducted a quantitative content analysis of 133 articles published in 11 academic journals to shed light on research topics, theories, methods, and authorship of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the PR field. Regarding the methodological approach, a balance between qualitative and quantitative research is evident, with a recent increase in mixed-method approaches. Content analysis was used most often, followed by experiments, surveys, comprehensive literature reviews, and case studies. The outcomes of Lee's study coincide with the overall outcomes of the 61 theses and dissertations examined in the current article. The meta-analysis of our study showed a duality of quantitative and qualitative methods as well.

Motion and Weaver (2005) found that critical public relations scholarship is increasingly required to justify the contribution that is made to theory and practice. Within this article, an integrated political economy and discourse analysis was deployed to examine engineering advocacy campaigns conducted by the life sciences network in New Zealand. The analysis demonstrated the value of examining the socio-political contexts in which public relations operates and the discourses that it seeks to produce or influence and thus provides a constructive foundation for further critical research.

Likewise, in the current study, the researchers found similar results to those of Motion and Weaver. We determined the importance of three substantial contexts. Socio-political and cultural contexts were clearly evident in the studies that were conducted in the seven countries previously mentioned. In the current study, the authors also examined the content, subject, method and technique used in the selected dissertations and theses.

Sisco et al. (2011) identified a stage of PR research where the majority of research and scholarly journal articles focused on a centralised body of theory as the field entered the first decade of the 21st century. The results of the study presented in this article, however, suggest that this expectation is unduly optimistic. The evidence demonstrates that after more than three decades of scholarly efforts, it is yet to be proven that public relations has a sufficiently central focus in its research and theory building to be deemed a mature discipline.

Ihlen and Verhoeven (2012) maintained some common starting points for a public relations identity for the 2010s with the aim of preserving both consistency and multiplicity. They argued that public relations should be studied as a social activity in its own right and that it must be understood in relation to its societal context. They pointed to some concepts (trust, legitimacy, understanding and reflection) that are crucial to understanding public relations practice. They also argued that issues of power, behaviour, and language must be addressed.

Edwards (2012) studied the importance of paradigmatic variety in the scholarly field of public relations. He considered the assumptions that underpin existing approaches to public relations to reveal the ways in which they are connected and differentiated along a series of continuums. He coined a new definition of public relations based on its organisational function.

In another study, Ye and Ki (2012) aimed to identify trends, patterns, and academic rigor in research studies focusing on internet-related public relations through a review of articles published between 1992 and 2009. They examined the authorship, theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and research topics addressed in these published articles. Key findings suggest an increasing trend in the number of published articles, a lack of applied theoretical frameworks, a dominance of quantitative research, and an emphasis on the use of the internet in public relations.

Pheung and Yun (2023) examined the intercultural factors in Malaysian PR practices in the context of a multiethnic nation by exploring cultural sensitivities among

practitioners. They explored the influences of cultural diversity through the cultural sensitivity theory, by examining whether ethnicity and religion affect messages and campaigns, and if education and language heighten effectiveness or cause miscommunication (p. 50).

Ciszek (2018) presented a historical overview of queer activism and inquiry, advocating for queer theorising in public relations and outlining future directions for theory building. His study was intended to be provocative and to serve as a disruption to contemporary public relations theory. It was an attempt toward a radical rethinking of how we come to identify, define, and understand the public relations discipline.

Pasadeos et al. (2010) investigated PR literature's most-cited works in the 1990s and identified research networks. In the present study, they expanded that work by examining the PR scholarship a decade later. They identified current authors and their publication outlets, taxonomized the most frequently cited works, and drew a co-citation network. Furthermore, they compared current findings with those of a decade earlier and speculated on the state of public relations as a scholarly discipline. In the last decade, concepts such as data, big data, algorithms and smart cities have gained prominence within urban planning as part of a broader turn toward a data-driven society. This development is predicted to revolutionise how we understand, plan, and govern cities and also affect how citizens participate in the planning process.

Coombs and Holladay (2015) noted that public relations identity in research sets boundaries that can limit or enhance the field. The authors examined the development of a "relationship identity" in PR research. Additionally, they produced important findings. They maintained that general public relations research, as opposed to subdisciplines such as crisis communication, is dominated by a relationship approach.

Taylor and Kent (2010) examined the way public relations students become socialised in their understanding of the value and power of social media in PR practice. They explored PR research on social media as well as professional claims about the value of social media as a PR tactic.

Watson (2008) aimed to identify and rank the most important topics for research in the field of public relations. A Delphi study on the priorities in PR research was conducted in 2007 among academics, practitioners and senior executives of professional and industry bodies and was used to investigate expert opinions on research priorities for public relations.

Lastly, Jain (2020) maintained that the new age of communication can be referred to as digital public relations. Digital PR is a mixture of traditional practices of public relations blended with social media content and search engine optimisation. In other words, the recent developments in technology and social media platforms have significantly transformed the public relations industry.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The PR field in the Arab states is undergoing substantial changes. New technologies, evolving consumer behaviours, and increasing competition are all shaping the way we study PR. In order to understand the crucial trends that are driving these changes, we conducted a meta-research to gather insights from PR scholarly work. We aimed to identify key trends in the field, and provide valuable insights that can be used by communication scholars to develop efficient strategies for addressing contemporary issues in PR.



## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to address and tackle these core elements:

1. To illuminate new issues addressed in PR research in the context of Arab states.
2. To examine the methods and techniques used by scholars in the PR field.
3. To investigate interdisciplinary approaches in the scholarly literature of PR theses and dissertations.

## METHODOLOGY

Several core questions were addressed in the present study. How do social media practitioners consider the challenges of using social media for community public relations? How do social media practitioners explain the impacts of public relations via social media? To what extent does social media affect the scholarly literature on public relations?

A total of 61 theses and dissertations, published from 2012 to 2022, were examined using meta-analysis. Many of these studies were conducted under the supervision of the principal author of the current study. A total of 23 master's theses and 38 PhD dissertations on various topics of PR research were thoroughly examined. These studies covered the following Arab countries: Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Jordan and Sudan. Up to 40 dissertation and theses addressed PR issues in Egypt while, 15 dissertations and theses addressed PR issues in Sudan. Furthermore, two theses were conducted in Kuwait and one MA thesis in each of the following countries: Iraq, Yemen, UAE and Jordan. The authors served in the reading committee of these theses and dissertations. The main author of the present study supervised many of them and was a member of the defence committee; hence, the opportunity to fully read them. These studies were conducted in the universities of Cairo, Ain Shams, Zagazig, Mansoura, University of Sharjah in UAE, Omdurman University in Sudan and the International University of Africa in Sudan. A tabulation sheet was developed to categorise the major substantial core elements of each thesis and dissertation.

### *Procedure of the study*

The meta-analysis was conducted based on basic criteria, and methodological techniques were identified. Firstly, the thematic aspects of each thesis and dissertation were noted. The socio-political and cultural contexts of each study were analysed. Interdisciplinary approaches were determined to reveal the relationship between the scholarly literature on public relations and other fields of communication. Meta-analysis is a quantitative and formal study design used to systematically assess the results of previous research to derive conclusions about that body of research. The thematic findings will be elaborated in detail in the following section.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.** Summary of the analysed MA theses

| Country | Topic of PR and:                                                                                                                                | Interdisciplinary Approach | Research Method |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Egypt   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crisis management</li> <li>• IMC</li> <li>• Social media</li> <li>• Political participation</li> </ul> | Available in all           | Quantitative    |
|         |                                                                                                                                                 |                            | "               |
|         |                                                                                                                                                 |                            | "               |
|         |                                                                                                                                                 |                            | "               |

**Table 1. (con't)**

| Country | Topic of PR and:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Interdisciplinary Approach | Research Method                                                     |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total quality management</li> <li>• Political usage of the Internet</li> <li>• Corporations' image</li> <li>• Women usage of e-marketing</li> <li>• Human rights issues</li> <li>• Professional boundaries and pressures</li> <li>• Political mobilisation</li> <li>• Cultural analysis</li> <li>• Citizenship</li> <li>• Political acculturation</li> </ul> |                            | "<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>Qualitative<br>Quantitative<br>" |
| Iraq    | Political campaigns of parties                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Available                  | Quantitative                                                        |
| Kuwait  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corruption issues</li> <li>• Uses of PR</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Available in both          | Quantitative<br>"                                                   |
| UAE     | Political campaigns of candidates                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Available                  | Quantitative                                                        |
| Sudan   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporation's image</li> <li>• Organisational thought</li> <li>• Activities of PR</li> <li>• Organisational PR</li> <li>• Communication skills</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Available in all           | Quantitative<br>"<br>"<br>"<br>"                                    |

Basically, the analysis identified the three core aspects of the current study objectives: subjects, methods and interdisciplinary approaches. The analysis of the master's theses revealed that the topics were varied, diverse and comprehensive. It was clearly demonstrated that interdisciplinary approaches were utilised. The methodological techniques used were mainly quantitative, although three master's degrees included both qualitative and quantitative methods. Several theses examined political communication in the context of public relations research. However, other interdisciplinary approaches were evident. These themes included organisational communication, cultural analysis, public relations management, social media effects, social movements, total quality management, integrated marketing communication and crisis management.

Some theses focused on women's issues in the public relations industry. Semiotic analysis was recently utilised in PR research in Egypt on an extensive level. Issues of citizenship, social movements and acculturation were extensively addressed in some theses. One can argue critically that public relations studies addressed many socio-political and cultural contexts of the Arab society. For instance, the political mobilisation of political parties in Iraq was studied, as was the social media shaping of civic trends toward issues of corruption in Kuwait. The use of public relations in Kuwait was also examined. In the United Arab Emirates, a study was conducted to examine the political campaigns of the candidates of the National Assembly. In Sudan, many theses examined image creation and the activities of organisational public relations systems. In addition, public relations programs for diplomacy and conscious awareness were also studied.

**Table 2.** Summary of the analysed PhD dissertations

| Country | Topic of PR and:                | Interdisciplinary Approach | Research Method   |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| Egypt   | • Corporate communication       | Available in all           | Quantitative      |
|         | • Political marketing           |                            | "                 |
|         | • Digital PR                    |                            | "                 |
|         | • Human rights                  |                            | "                 |
|         | • Information seeking           |                            | "                 |
|         | • Management                    |                            | "                 |
|         | • Electronic marketing          |                            | "                 |
|         | • Tourism and informatics       |                            | "                 |
|         | • Professionalism               |                            | "                 |
|         | • Marketing                     |                            | Qualit. + Quanti. |
|         | • Future of PR                  |                            | "                 |
|         | • Corporations' reputation      |                            | "                 |
|         | • Advertising                   |                            | "                 |
|         | • Public opinion                |                            | "                 |
|         | • PR quality                    |                            | "                 |
|         | • Crisis management             |                            | "                 |
|         | • Women political participation |                            | "                 |
|         | • Media political campaigns     |                            | "                 |
|         | • Religious thought marketing   |                            | "                 |
|         | • Elite usage of the Internet   |                            | "                 |
|         | • Governance                    |                            | "                 |
|         | • Social networking marketing   |                            | "                 |
|         | • Challenges of PR              |                            | "                 |
|         | • Trends of public opinion      |                            | "                 |
| Yemen   | The public sphere               | Available                  | Quantitative      |
| Jordan  | NGOs                            | Available                  | Quantitative      |
| Sudan   | • Activities of PR              | Available in all           | Quantitative      |
|         | • Organisational PR             |                            | "                 |
|         | • Diplomatic PR                 |                            | "                 |

For the PhD sample studies in the current research, the analysis revealed that all of these dissertations focused on quantitative analysis, and only one dissertation combined both quantitative and qualitative methodological analyses.

The results revealed the various research methods and techniques utilised in the dissertations conducted in the seven Arab states. The findings highlight their essential roles in public relations research, each contributing unique insights and value to the understanding of the Arab audiences, messaging, and the effectiveness of communication strategies. Quantitative research involves the gathering and analysis of numerical data, while qualitative research focuses on understanding the underlying reasons, motivations, and opinions through in-depth exploration and interpretation of non-numerical data.

Overall, the selected scholarly work primarily utilised quantitative methods while only a few employed qualitative methods. Quantitative techniques are invaluable in PR research for several reasons. Firstly, they provide statistical data and measurable insights, allowing for the precise measurement of campaign outcomes, audience behaviour, and the impact of communication initiatives. For example, through the studies done in the seven Arab states, quantitative research can help PR professionals gauge the success of a social media campaign by tracking metrics such as reach, engagement, and conversion rates. Additionally, quantitative techniques enable researchers to identify trends, patterns,



and correlations within large datasets, providing actionable insights for PR strategy and decision-making. By utilising surveys, experiments, and statistical analysis, PR scholars can quantify the reach and impact of their efforts, which is vital for demonstrating the value of PR to stakeholders and decision-makers within an organisation.

On the other hand, qualitative techniques offer a deeper understanding of the human elements of public relations, providing rich and nuanced insights that complement quantitative findings. Only three MA theses and one dissertation utilised qualitative methods. Through methods such as interviews, focus groups, and content analysis, qualitative research allows PR professionals to explore the underlying motivations, perceptions, and emotions of their target audience. This kind of research is invaluable for uncovering the attitudes, values, and cultural nuances that shape audience perceptions and behaviours in the Arab states, which are often missed by quantitative data alone. Qualitative techniques also enable PR professionals to gain a more holistic understanding of public opinion, media coverage, and stakeholder perspectives. By delving into the meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to different messages and narratives, qualitative research can uncover valuable insights that can inform the design and implementation of more resonant and impactful communication strategies.

Additionally, qualitative techniques are well-suited for exploring emerging trends, issues, and topics that may not be easily captured through quantitative measures alone. For instance, in the context of crisis management, qualitative research plays a crucial role in understanding how different stakeholders perceive an organisation's response to a crisis and the potential reputational impact. Through methods such as media content analysis and in-depth interviews, qualitative techniques can provide valuable insights into the narratives being advanced by media outlets, public sentiment, and stakeholder concerns, which can inform the development of more targeted and effective crisis communication strategies.

The current study highlights that both quantitative and qualitative techniques also play critical roles in audience segmentation and targeting. Quantitative methods are essential for identifying broad demographic and psychographic trends within a target audience, while qualitative research can provide a deeper understanding of the nuanced differences, preferences, and behaviours within these segments. By combining both approaches, PR professionals can develop more robust audience profiles and tailored communication strategies that resonate with specific audience segments.

## DISCUSSION

The topics studied in the analysed scholarly work highlight different socio-political and cultural contexts in the Arab society. This leads us to review the relationship of these findings to the global literature. Meta-research involves a critical assessment and synthesis of existing research studies on a specific topic or issue. It is a systematic and comprehensive approach to reviewing and analysing the outcomes of previous research, with the goal of providing a more complete and accurate understanding of the topic under investigation. The term "meta-research" was first introduced by social scientists in the 1970s.

### *Subject and content*

Interdisciplinary approaches in contemporary public relations research are crucial for several reasons. They allow for a comprehensive understanding of complex PR issues by drawing on insights from diverse fields such as sociology, psychology, communication, and marketing. This multi-faceted perspective enables researchers to address PR challenges

from various angles, leading to more nuanced and effective solutions. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration fosters innovation and creativity, as it encourages the integration of different theories, methods, and data sources. By leveraging insights from multiple disciplines, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of human behaviour, societal trends, and media dynamics, which are essential in today's rapidly evolving PR landscape. Embracing interdisciplinary approaches enriches the field of public relations by fostering holistic, adaptable, and impactful research outcomes. Indeed, this was evident in the current study.

Critically, the authors believe that public relations constitutes various aspects like communication, marketing, psychology, sociology, business, and media. Interdisciplinary subjects enable PR professionals to develop a multidimensional approach to their work. They can draw on knowledge and insights from different fields, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in PR.

Jelen-Sanchez (2017) observed that several practitioners and experts in the field of public relations have emphasised the importance of public engagement in the context of new technological and social developments. She studied the impact on reshaping and reconfiguring public relations. While the practice is embracing new trends, the issues of understanding, explaining and managing the engagement of different members of the public appear to be largely unexplored in the public relations discipline. Critically, her study aimed to examine the state of public engagement studies in public relations scholarship in terms of themes, contexts, theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. The study conducted a content analysis of 59 journal articles on public engagement. The results indicate that the few studies on public engagement tended to be mostly concerned with social media and online engagement. She found that the studies depended on management/functional and relational perspectives, focused on organisations anchored in Western traditions and were dominated by quantitative methodology.

The PR landscape is constantly evolving, influenced by technological advancements, media trends, and societal changes. Interdisciplinary subjects tackled by Arab scholars can help PR professionals stay updated on industry developments and emerging trends, ensuring they can adapt their approaches and strategies accordingly. To this effect, interdisciplinary subjects enrich PR professionals' knowledge base, enhance their problem-solving capabilities, improve their communication skills, and enable them to work collaboratively in multidisciplinary environments. These factors contribute to their effectiveness in navigating the complex and dynamic field of public relations.

### *Methods and techniques*

We found that the majority of the studies relied heavily on quantitative research methods. This coincides with other studies done in global contexts. However, the Arab world has a distinct cultural and social context with specific norms, values, and sensitivities. PR methods and techniques need to be tailored to respect and understand these cultural nuances. Informed cultural sensitivity ensures that PR campaigns and communication strategies are received well by Arab audiences, avoiding misunderstandings or unintended offense. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, the topics reflected the peculiarity of the cultural contexts in the seven countries from which the sample studies were selected.

Botan and Taylor (2004) argued that public relations is both a professional practice and a subfield of communication with its own research and theory base. The field of public relations is developing into a theoretically based area of applied communication that has the potential to inform communication/mass communication and to offer theoretical and conceptual tools that are useful for health, risk, and political communication, among

others. Notably, Arab scholars benefitted from such development on the levels of theory and method.

Kent and Saffer (2014) noted that new technologies have dramatically expanded over the past decade. New features on websites, powerful mobile device applications, and the subsequent restructuring of news services have dramatically changed the public relations profession. This study sought to learn about the broader issues of technology and forecast trends in online communication technologies. In an effort to learn what technology professionals outside of public relations know about new technology and social media, this study used a Delphi methodology and solicited the participation of technology professionals from computer science, professional writing, communication studies, art, business, music and other areas. The first two rounds of the Delphi findings suggest that public relations professionals need to broaden their understanding of new technologies to consider social and relational issues rather than the current focus on practice.

Critically, one can identify similarities between the studies conducted in the seven Arab countries and those mentioned in the literature and results sections. Communication technology and subsequently, the expansive diffusion of social media platforms have already hit the nucleus of the public relations industry at the professional and scholarly levels. The field itself witnessed a new change in academics' treatment of data, approaches and theories. The following studies provide an idea of the diversified new topics in the public relations field.

Panopoulos et al. (2018) aimed to shed light on the innovation adoption process taking place in the public relations field through the use of Web 2.0 applications and social network activities. They examined the innovation adoption of electronic public relations (EPR) at personal, organisational, and environmental levels by employing for each of these levels, a number of different subdimensions leading to the creation and verification of a hierarchical tree structure. EPR innovation adoption can be influenced at the personal, organisational, and environmental levels.

The analysis outcome of our study revealed many substantial elements that need to be stated. First, building strong relationships with stakeholders, government officials, community leaders, and influencers in the Arab world is crucial for successful PR efforts. Methods like personalised communication, networking events, and face-to-face interactions are highly valued in the Arab culture and can contribute to relationship-building.

Second, crisis communication is a key aspect of PR. Arab countries have faced unique challenges and crises, making crisis communication methods and techniques important. PR professionals need to be prepared to handle crises effectively, ensuring timely and accurate information dissemination, managing reputational damage, and maintaining trust during challenging times. It was found that crisis communication was a very common issue in the sample studies.

Third, the Arab world has a growing digital landscape, with high rates of internet and social media penetration. PR methods and techniques need to adapt to this digital transformation, leveraging social media platforms, digital campaigns, and online influencers to effectively engage with the Arab audience. The coming studies have some common links with that we have stated.

Indeed, there were variations in terms of methods and techniques used in the sample studies. In Arab PR research, surveys were conducted to gather quantitative data on topics such as public opinion, attitudes towards specific brands or issues, media consumption habits, or perceptions of organisational reputation. Content analysis was also used to study the media coverage of PR campaigns, news articles related to specific organisations or industries, social media posts, or any other form of public communication. By quantifying

variables such as tone, topic, or sentiment, researchers can gain insights into how PR messages are presented and received in the Arab media landscape.

Techniques such as regression analysis, chi-square tests, t-tests, or analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyse survey data, experiment results, or other quantitative datasets. Furthermore, various analytics tools were used to track and measure metrics such as reach, engagement, sentiment analysis, or user demographics. By analysing social media data, PR researchers can assess the impact of specific campaigns, track public sentiment, identify influencers, and gain insights into the effectiveness of different communication strategies.

### *Interdisciplinary approaches*

Basically, PR is a field that incorporates various disciplines and approaches to effectively manage communication and relationships between organisations and their publics. The analysis results revealed some elements of public relations that often involve interdisciplinary approaches. In terms of the epistemological element, the interdisciplinary approach involved integrating concepts from psychology, sociology, linguistics, and media studies to develop effective communication strategies in some of the selected seven countries. These elements help PR professionals understand audience behaviour, message impact, and how to craft persuasive messages. Second, this interdisciplinary approach involved leveraging marketing concepts such as market research, segmentation, branding, and promotional tactics to achieve organisational goals. This will help PR practitioners develop cohesive campaigns that align messaging and branding across different communication channels.

Third, journalistic values influenced PR strategies to craft compelling narratives and engage media outlets effectively. PR professionals often collaborate with journalists, utilise media contacts, and adopt journalistic writing techniques to pitch stories or manage crisis communications. This was evident in the number of theses and dissertations that tackled the issues of crisis management. Fourth, interdisciplinary approaches involved incorporating elements of technology, data analysis, and user experience design to develop effective online communication strategies. PR professionals work collaboratively with digital experts such as web designers, social media managers, and data analysts to optimise online presence, engage audiences, and monitor online reputation.

Finally, it was evident that PR scholars need a deep understanding of public opinion and psychology to shape their communication strategies. By incorporating elements of sociology, political science, and psychology, PR scholars can analyse public attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours to tailor messages and campaigns accordingly. The interdisciplinary approach helps PR practitioners identify stakeholders, anticipate reactions, and build relationships based on a thorough understanding of target audiences. In addition, by using interdisciplinary approaches, public relations scholars can develop well-rounded strategies, informed by diverse perspectives and fields of study. This integration enhances their ability to understand and engage with audiences, build strong relationships, and achieve organisational goals effectively.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, 61 theses and dissertations on PR were examined in terms of methodology. The majority of these studies depended to a great extent on quantitative techniques rather than qualitative ones. Coinciding variables were evident in these studies, such as socio-



political and cultural variables. New shifts in the type of PR research topics were also evident. Notably, interdisciplinary approaches revealed the nature of these shifts. The particular topics examined in the Arab countries included civic engagement, governance, social movements, digital public relations and democratic transformation.

In conclusion, the authors examined dissertations and theses that were conducted in some Arab universities. The meta-analysis results revealed that three core objectives have been met. Clearly, the content, method and interdisciplinary aspects have been sorted out. The authors related all these aspects to the scholarly literature used in the current study. The outcomes included the importance of the following topics: corporate social responsibility, communication crisis management, governance, public relations and social movements, and the future of public relations research.

In addition, the integration of quantitative and qualitative techniques is essential for comprehensive and effective public relations research, as highlighted by the current study. While quantitative methods provide valuable statistical insights, measurement, and trend identification, qualitative techniques offer a deeper understanding of human motivations, perceptions, and cultural nuances. By leveraging both approaches, PR professionals can gain a more holistic understanding of their audiences, develop more impactful communication strategies, and demonstrate the value of PR to stakeholders and organisations in the seven countries.

Interdisciplinary approaches are crucial in studying PR in the Arab world due to the diverse cultural, social, and political landscapes. With multidisciplinary perspectives, scholars can analyse the intersection of media, culture, and politics, understand the impact of globalisation on communication dynamics, and explore the influence of culture on public relations practices. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches enable a comprehensive examination of the historical and technological factors shaping public relations in the Arab world. This holistic approach fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances within the region, facilitating more informed and contextually relevant research and practice.

Finally, the current study revealed the important role of interdisciplinary PR research in the scholarly communication literature of Arab states. Firstly, it contributes to the generation of knowledge and understanding of communication dynamics specific to the region, including cultural nuances, media landscapes, and public opinion dynamics. Secondly, it helps in identifying the challenges and opportunities that are unique to the Arab states, thereby informing the development of theoretical frameworks and conceptual models that are contextually relevant.

Additionally, PR research in the Arab states serves to bridge the gap between academic scholarship and industry practices, providing valuable insights for practitioners and policymakers. By addressing pertinent issues such as media freedom, ethical considerations, and the role of technology in communication, it enriches the scholarly literature with practical relevance and actionable recommendations. Furthermore, it fosters collaboration and knowledge exchange among researchers within the Arab states and globally, contributing to the enrichment of the broader field of public relations and communication studies.

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